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## **FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA ANNOUNCES MAJOR STATEWIDE INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE YOUNG CHILDREN HEALTH INSURANCE**

### ***Matching Funds Program will Boost Counties' Efforts to Aid Uninsured***

**Sacramento** – Rob Reiner, chair of First 5 California, announced today a \$170 million statewide initiative to provide health insurance to California children from birth to age 5. Reiner unveiled the Health Access to All Children initiative in Sacramento, surrounded by local officials, health care leaders, and First 5/County Children and Families Commission representatives. The \$170 million will be invested over the next four years, with additional funding likely.

The initiative could provide health, dental and vision coverage to about 48,000 California children who are ineligible for other publicly funded health insurance programs at a time when budget cuts loom for social service programs. According to the California Health Interview Survey, approximately 200,000 children between the ages of 0 to 5 are currently uninsured throughout the state, with the vast majority eligible for publicly funded insurance programs. California currently ranks 6<sup>th</sup> worst among states in the US in terms of children who are uninsured, according to U.S. Census figures.

“Being unable to afford health insurance is not just an issue for the very poor,” Reiner said. “Many working families making \$55,000 a year cannot afford health care for their children. This issue affects all of us—from overcrowded emergency rooms to higher health insurance premiums. It is our goal to ensure that all California children have health insurance.”

Reiner’s announcement coincides with the “Cover the Uninsured Week,” a national movement designed to bring attention to the growing health care crisis facing the country. According to the most recent census data figures, almost 44 million people – 15.2 percent of the total U.S. population – were uninsured in 2002, up from 14.6 percent in the previous year. This represents the largest single-year increase in both the number and rate of uninsured people in a decade. And according to an Employee Benefit Research Institute survey, the problem is particularly acute for children, who make up nearly 20 percent of the uninsured. Of this group, 30 percent are age birth to 5. Uninsured children are more likely than insured children to lack a usual source of health care, to go untreated and to experience significantly worse health outcomes.

The Health Access for All Initiative is a matching fund program with the First 5/County Children and Families Commissions. It will also focus on outreach efforts to enroll children in publicly funded

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health insurance programs for which they are eligible. Already around the state, numerous county commissions have committed to programs providing insurance to the uninsured, qualifying them for the First 5 State Commission's one-to-four dollar matching funds program. Los Angeles County has committed \$100 million over the next five years, while Riverside and San Bernardino counties have each committed \$2 million to the program this year. San Francisco County has committed \$1 million over the next two years with Santa Clara and San Mateo counties investing \$3 million and \$2.3 million respectively this year.

Furthermore, *First 5/County Children and Families Commissions* in the Sacramento region announced a partnership to invest more than \$16 million to create the first-ever regional plan to provide comprehensive health insurance coverage for children. Through their "Healthy Kids" program, *First 5/County Children and Families Commissions* in Sacramento, Colusa, El Dorado, Yolo and Yuba will provide universal health coverage for all children in the region whose family income falls within 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Currently, health insurance for children is provided in a patchwork manner, with different programs dependent on a child's age, family income and residency status. The counties hope their effort will provide a roadmap for other regions in the state seeking to combine resources and deliver services more efficiently. Plans are already under way in several counties to apply for the State Commission's matching funds to further supplement their efforts.

"Given the dwindling resources available for health care during the state's fiscal crisis, the investment by the regional *First 5/County Children and Families Commissions* is an example of the positive impact Prop. 10 funds can have on California's children and families," said Sacramento County Supervisor Roger Dickinson, chair of First 5 Sacramento. "By investing in our children when they're young, we're helping them lead longer, healthier lives—which also means greater long-term savings for the state."

### **About First 5 California**

First 5 California (also known as the California Children and Families Commission) and 58 First 5 County Commissions were established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs for expectant parents and children up to age 5. Prop. 10 was designed to address the lack of public funding and support for early childhood development in the wake of a growing body of scientific evidence indicating that the emotional, physical, social and developmental environments to which children are exposed have a profound impact on their ability to reach their greatest potential in school and to become productive members of society.